

Dear SOMHELP members,

Salt. Sodium. MSG. No matter what name it goes by, sodium in our diets is adding up to a big problem. High sodium diets are linked to hypertension. It is estimated that one-third of adult Americans have hypertension. Hypertension can (and often does) lead to cardiovascular disease like heart attacks, stroke and other life-threatening events. Ouch! A commonly heard response is, "Oh, I never salt my food, so I'm doing fine." Not adding extra salt to your food is a great first step. Unfortunately, it is estimated that 77% (a little over three-quarters) of our sodium intake comes from processed foods, and only 5% comes from salt that we add from the salt shaker.

What can you do? Let's face it, most of us are not going to check the label on everything we eat and tally up our sodium intake for the day (even though that IS a great way to become aware of how much you're actually eating). Here are some quick easy tips for reducing your sodium intake and increasing your appreciation of other natural flavors.

Maximize flavor with sensible amounts

1. Shop carefully. The first step is to make smart choices at the grocery store. Choose sodium-free, low-sodium, or no-salt-added convenience foods. Sometimes organic versions of packaged foods are lower in sodium than regular versions.
 2. Cook sensibly. Rinse and drain canned foods to wash away some of the sodium. When cooking rice or pasta, don't salt the cooking water. Infuse meats and fish with flavor by marinating with a home-made marinade (using mostly things like vinegar, lemon juice, herbs and spices) – so you can control the sodium. Use salt at the very end, so it is right on the surface of the food and heightens the flavor.
 3. Eat well. The less salt you consume, the less your palate (taste buds) will crave.
 4. Be aware: low- and fat-free foods may be a bit higher in sodium than their full-fat counterparts, since sodium is sometimes used to make up for the flavor removed with the fat. A good compromise? Choose a reduced-fat version, and check the label.
 5. Dine in or bring your own meal most of the time. Try and limit eating out to two or fewer times per week. The sodium content of some restaurant foods is downright scary.
- Excerpted from Cooking Light, "Sodium Savvy," by David Hagedorn, October 2008.*

Resources for more information:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/sodium/NU00284>: good general overview from the Mayo Clinic.

<http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/saltupdatedec08.pdf> From the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI): salt content of some common foods – a side-by-side comparison.

Information contained in the SOMHELP e-mails is general in nature, and not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease. As always, you should consult with your healthcare provider before making any changes.

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